

Summary

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# Take heart if you are befuddled

MEL DUVAL  
Calgary Herald

If you feel overwhelmed by today's technology, and perhaps a little dumb compared to your 10-year-old, take heart.

Jim Carroll, a leading writer on the information age, says it's not your fault.

It's the technology that's stupid.

In his latest book, *Surviving the Information Age*, Carroll

says the baby boomer generation has had the privilege—and the misfortune—to live through the birth and rise of the computer.

Not only has the boomer generation had to learn a new technology on the run, it has had to deal with it at its worst.

From the finicky punch cards and magnetic tapes of the '70s, to the definitely user-unfriendly DOS environment, boomers have seen it all.

"The boomer generation has had to cope with computer technology when it was very naked, very prone to errors and very primitive," he said during a recent stop in Calgary.

"As a result it hasn't been easy to learn. A large percentage of the population developed a certain amount of fear and mistrust of computers—and that's understandable."

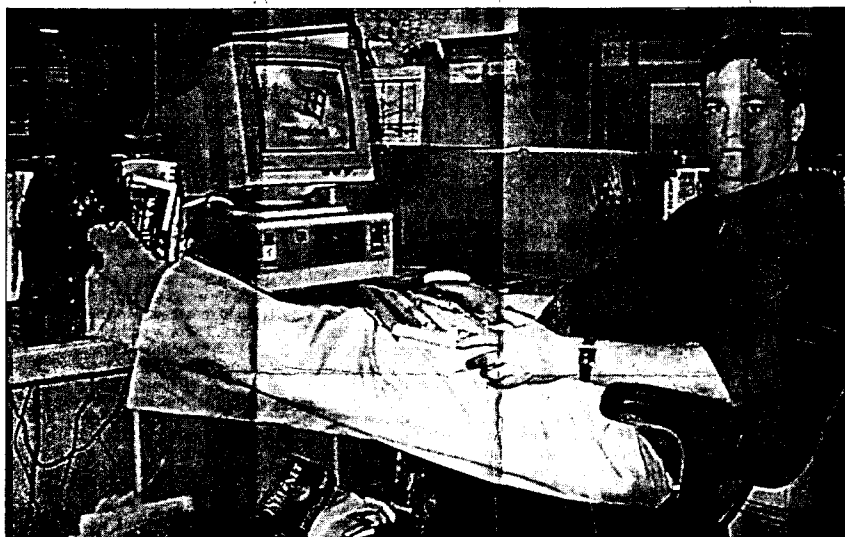
In many ways Carroll's book is meant to soothe and calm the thousands of people who fear they are being trapped in the slow lane of the information highway, or not getting on the road at all.

## CHICKEN SOUP

He calls it chicken soup for your computer soul.

As a technology writer, he constantly meets people who struggle with the

## Writer says it's the technology that's dumb



Mel Duval, Calgary Herald

**AUTHOR JIM CARROLL:** The boomer generation has had to cope with computer technology when it was very naked, very prone to errors and very primitive. As a result, it hasn't been easy to learn.

paragraph of his book.

"Is it any wonder that we have such a unique relationship with them?" Does that mean it's OK to sit back and blame it on the machines? Certainly not, says Carroll.

In fact, it is vitally important that baby boomers get involved in the wired world before they are left too far behind.

"Anyone who walks around proclaiming themselves to be a Luddite better be prepared for what's going to happen," he adds.

"If you're 45 and out of a job, it's going to be very difficult to get hired again unless you keep up with the technology."

So where do you get started? Carroll says a good

place to start is by imitating your 10-year-old. They don't sit down at a computer tentatively push a button and wait to see if something goes wrong—the plunge right in because they're not afraid they're going to break.

Secondly, he says you should establish some goals.

"Don't try to do everything at once. You don't have to become an expert overnight," he adds.

## KEY ON POSITIVE

Also, try to look for the positive in your progress and with the technology itself.

Too often, boomers are apt to criticize technology, primarily because they're threatened by it.

They'll point to the 80-year-old woman who received a tax bill for a million, or pornography on the Internet, instead of focusing on the positive contributions that computers have made.

Carroll notes that the Internet has made it possible for him and his wife to work from home.

"We work out of a wonderful home office that places us among the birds and squirrels, not the office tower the clogged streets."

"I put the blame for this marvelous state of affairs directly on computer technology and the wonders of telecommunications," he says.

*Surviving the Information Age* has a humorous look at the reasons why many people feel they are at war with technology.

More importantly, it provides encouragement for those who feel trapped and are looking for help in joining the wired world.

## Computers don't make mistakes

From Jim Carroll's *Surviving the Information Age*

"To err is human, but to really foul things up requires a computer."

Farmer's Almanac, 1978

By 1969, so many people started getting charge card bills with errors that Newsweek magazine was prompted to write an article called *The Great Snafu*. It noted how one fellow kept receiving past due notices for \$0.00 until he sent a cheque in for \$0.00 to keep the computer happy, and the story of another lady who was charged double the actual purchase price every time she bought something.

"The major difference between a thing that might go wrong and a thing that cannot possibly go wrong, is that when a thing that cannot possibly go wrong goes wrong, it usually turns out to be impossible to get at and repair."

Douglas Adams

In 1988, owners of some GM Chevrolet Astro and GMC Safari vans were advised that the rotten egg smell coming from their vehicles was the fault of a computer. It turns out that the fault was with a computer that monitors the fuel mix for the vehicles.

In 1985, a computer malfunction at the Bank of New York almost brought financial havoc to global markets. The problem was overcome only when the Federal Reserve Bank provided \$20 billion US to the bank to help it get around the temporary foul-up—a \$32 billion overdraft.

"My advice? So what!... Computers will break. Things will go wrong. Murphy's Law will kick in. Whatever the case may be, come to accept the potential fragility of what you are dealing with."

— Jim Carroll

